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Import Form

Form Type: [redacted] **Date:** 10/30/2020

Title: (U) [redacted]

Approved By: [redacted]

Drafted By: SA [redacted]

Case ID #: 804I-PD-3115926 (U/~~FOUO~~) [redacted]

801I-PD-6590466 (U/~~FOUO~~) [redacted]

Synopsis: (U) [redacted]

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the U.S. State Department over an 'attack' by American law enforcement on Russian reporters [redacted] b6 b7C

Per the articles, the manipulated stories/videos involved a small group of Portland protesters setting one Bible on fire, along with one American flag. Within hours, the controversial video went viral, nationwide, catching the attention of politicians and a divided electorate. Local media KOIN 6 did verify that one Bible and one American flag had been burned by protesters, but not by a mass of rioters holding Black Lives Matter signs tossing Bibles on to a blaze, as portrayed by Russian media in its disinformation effort.

Per the media reporting, since the 2016 Election Russia's disinformation techniques have evolved into a form of information laundering, whereby stories originate with Russian-backed news sites that are in-turn picked-up by Americans on social media or in domestic news outlets. Often by the time a story reaches most of the American audience, there is little to indicate that the story was created by Russia to fuel grievances and deepen political divisions. The most useful stories are those with a kernel of truth, that are then manipulated for disinformation purposes. The Bible-burning video was put out by Ruptly, the video news agency affiliated with the Kremlin-financed RT news outlet, who in-turn wrote an entire story about the Bible burning. Upon publishing these stories online, Ruptly and RT let Twitter take it from there.

The actual story, as reported by KOIN 6, the local CBS News affiliate, did report the burning of one Bible by protesters but also reported that a group of women calling themselves Moms United for Black Lives Matter attempted to put out the fire - a detail not included in the Ruptly video. Per the article, the Portland video represents the Russian

disinformation strategy at its most successful - taking a small but potentially inflammatory incident, blowing it out of proportion, and letting others on the political fringes in the United States, Canada, and/or Europe spread it.

On July 22nd, TASS - the Russian News Agency reported Russia's embassy to the United States had handed a note of protest to the U.S. State Department over a May 31st attack by American law enforcement on Russian reporters [redacted] Per the report, the individuals were identified as

[redacted]

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How a Bible burning in Portland reveals Russia's efforts to upend the 2020 U.S. election

Updated Aug 12, 2020; Posted Aug 11, 2020

By Douglas Perry | The Oregonian/OregonLive

Yes, the Russians are working hard to disrupt the 2020 U.S. elections and guide voters toward the result they want. So said American intelligence officials in a recent briefing to Congress.
And what does this Russian election interference look like? Picture hundreds of Portlanders making a bonfire out of Bibles and American flags.

"Left-wing activists bring a stack of Bibles to burn in front of the federal courthouse in Portland," Malaysia-based Donald Trump supporter Ian Miles Cheong wrote in a tweet on Aug. 1, with a video attached.

The same day, the conservative news outlet The Federalist wrote: "A video posted to Twitter on Saturday shows rioters holding Black Lives Matter signs tossing Bibles into a fire. Bystanders stood and watched as the flames licked away at the pages of the books."
Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, a 2016 Republican presidential candidate, soon weighed in. "This is who they are," he tweeted.

The video that started a rolling viral outrage across mostly right-wing news platforms and social-media timelines shows a gaggle of young people in masks chanting anti-Trump slogans as one person lights aflame what looks like a graphic novel. Another masked individual then drops an American flag on top of it. Twigs and newspapers are later added to the fire.

The video came from Ruptly, a Russian-government-backed news agency. "[T]he Portland Bible burnings appear to be one of the first viral Russian disinformation hits of the 2020 presidential campaign," The New York Times reported Tuesday.

That doesn't mean the book in the video wasn't a Bible.

The respected fact-checking website Snopes noted last week that it isn't clear in the various relevant Portland protest videos from Aug. 1 whether the items "being burned were, in fact, Bibles," but it ultimately determined that one Bible did get torched that night, pointing to reporting by KOIN 6 reporter Danny Peterson.
But that's the thing about disinformation:

It leverages social media to create a snowball effect, a mammoth virtual version of the children's game Telephone. A Bible possibly is burned in a small fire, apparently with almost all of the protesters in the vicinity that night unaware of it, and online this quickly becomes a bonfire, with "rioters holding Black Lives Matter signs tossing Bibles" into the blaze.

The point of this Information Age disinformation is to pump out online content that has been edited with a specific purpose in mind -- in this case, to give the false impression that Portland protesters commonly burn Bibles -- and then let the targeted audience's imaginations take flight. The Ruptly video doesn't show that a group of protesters that night tried to put out the fire.

The video of the Aug. 1 "Bible fire" in Portland might be, as The New York Times put it, "one of the first viral Russian disinformation hits of the 2020 presidential campaign." But it almost certainly isn't among the most effective.

Those would be tweets and Facebook memes that reinforce biases and misperceptions, and spark anger, but can't be debunked because they don't rely on specific news events or because they're presented as everyday Americans' opinions. Millions of us are seeing them every day.

-- Douglas Perry

A Bible Burning, a Russian News Agency and a Story Too Good to Check Out

By Matthew Rosenberg and Julian E. Barnes, *The New York Times*

- Aug. 11, 2020

WASHINGTON — For some of President Trump's loudest cheerleaders, it was a story too good to check out: Black Lives Matters protesters in Portland, Ore., had burned a stack of Bibles, and then topped off the fire with American flags. There was even a video to prove it.

The story was a near-perfect fit for a central Trump campaign talking point — that with liberals and Democrats comes godless disorder — and it went viral among Republicans within hours of appearing earlier this month. The New York Post wrote about it, as did The Federalist, saying that the protesters had shown "their true colors." Senator Ted Cruz, the Texas Republican, said of the protesters, "This is who they are." Donald Trump Jr., the president's son, tweeted that antifa had moved to "the book burning phase."

The truth was far more mundane. A few protesters among the many thousands appear to have burned a single Bible — and possibly a second — for kindling to start a bigger fire. None of the other protesters seemed to notice or care.

Yet in the rush to paint all the protesters as Bible-burning zealots, few of the politicians or commentators who weighed in on the incident took the time to look into the story's veracity, or to figure out that it had originated with a Kremlin-backed video news agency. And now, days later, the Portland Bible burnings appear to be one of the first viral Russian disinformation hits of the 2020 presidential campaign.

With Election Day drawing closer, the Russian efforts to influence the vote appear to be well underway. American intelligence officials said last week that Russia was using a range of techniques to denigrate Democrats and their presumptive presidential nominee, Joseph R. Biden Jr. And late last month, intelligence officials

briefed Congress on Russian efforts — both covert and overt — to stoke anger over the nationwide racial-justice protests.

Russian officials have aggressively sought to refute the allegations. But American officials are growing increasingly confident in their assessment, and say the Russian tactics are evolving. Moscow, they say, has shifted away from the fake social media accounts and bots used by the Internet Research Agency and other groups to amplify false articles ahead of the 2016 vote. Instead, the Russians are relying increasingly on English-language news sites to push out incendiary stories that can be picked up and spread by Americans, many of whom have proved as eager as foreign powers to stoke partisan divisions inside the United States.

The Russian technique is a kind of information laundering, akin to money laundering. Stories originate with Russian-backed news sites, some of them directly connected to Moscow's spy agencies, officials and experts said. They are then picked up by Americans on social media or in domestic news outlets, and their origins quickly become obscured. Often, by the time a story reaches most of its American audience, there is little to indicate that it was created to fuel grievances and deepen political divisions.

Some of the news outlets used by Russia are well known, like RT, the Kremlin-financed operation whose video news agency, Ruptly, put out the video of the Bible burning. Others are more obscure, including some directly connected to Russia's spy agencies, and are used to actively test themes and stories to see which ones play best.

Some stories are tailored to appeal to conservatives, others to an audience that might be best described as the alt-left. Many of them are made to exacerbate racial tensions ahead of the election, officials said earlier this year, well before the recent civil rights protests began.

Some of the stories spread by the Russian news outlets are outright fictions. But the most useful ones — the ones most likely to go viral — are those with a kernel of truth, like the tale of Bible burnings in Portland. It offers a case study in how the Russian information-laundering operation works, and how potent a weapon it can be.

Images Selected to Mislead

The video on which the story is based came from Ruptly, which regularly streams a live feed from the protests for a few hours each night and then clips together a short video of highlights. The livestream and the clip later edited down by Ruptly shows at least one Bible burning after midnight on Aug. 1, as some protesters were trying to build a fire. Another clip shows what may have been the same Bible or a second one. A small crowd can be seen hanging around, some of the people watching the flames grow higher, but the scene looks and sounds as if it is far from the main action of the protest.

The Bible appears to be used as kindling by two protesters working on the fire. There is no discernible reaction from the crowd as the book is put in the flames along with twigs and branches, notebook pages and newspapers. The crowd does cheer when an American flag is thrown on the flames.

Apart from the Ruptly videographer, only one other journalist — a local television reporter — heard about the Bible burning, and noted it with a single sentence in a lengthy report on that night's protests. The story, by KOIN, the local CBS News affiliate, also reported that a group of women calling themselves Moms United for Black Lives Matter attempted to put out the fire — a detail not included in the Ruptly video, which was edited to string together a number of clips from the night. (A New York Times reporter had observed a truck offering free Bibles at the protests earlier that night, though it was not clear whether it provided the book that was burned.)

Ruptly instead made the Bible burning a focus of its protest coverage that night. The news agency tweeted the video twice on Aug. 1 — here and here — and featured it on its website. In the tweets and text that accompany the video on the agency's website, the Bible burning is presented as the night's central event; the flag burning is secondary. RT, the network that runs Ruptly, also wrote an entire story about the Bible burning.

Ruptly and RT then let Twitter take it from there.

The video was first tweeted by an account that lists two cities — Oklahoma City and Abu Dhabi — as its users' location and has only a few dozen followers. It was soon after deleted. But before it disappeared, the tweet was picked up by a Malaysian named Ian Miles Cheong who has amassed a large Twitter following by playing a right-wing American raconteur on social media.

Mr. Cheong added his own commentary to the initial tweet, wildly exaggerating what the Ruptly video showed. "Left-wing activists bring a stack of Bibles to burn in front of the federal courthouse in Portland," he wrote.

His tweet quickly became the basis for an entire day of outrage from right-wing news outlets, Republican political figures and alt-right commentators. It was Mr. Cheong whose tweet spurred the younger Mr. Trump, Mr. Cruz and numerous other high-profile Republicans to weigh in. It was also held up as evidence of the protesters' depravity by prominent alt-right conspiracy theorists like Jack Posobiec, a correspondent for the One America News Network, which is much favored by the president.

It has since been retweeted more than 26,000 times.

Asked about his tweet, Mr. Cheong said he "was just trawling through Twitter looking for 'Portland' as I normally do" and heard talk of it of the Bible burnings.

He did not see the stacks of Bibles being burned that he described in his tweet. All he saw was the Ruptly video of the single burning Bible.

"Apart from the Ruptly video," he wrote in a direct message on Twitter, "I don't think anyone else got it directly."

The Portland video represents the Russian disinformation strategy at its most successful. Take a small but potentially inflammatory incident, blow it out of proportion and let others on the political fringes in the United States or Canada or Europe spread it.

Mr. Cheong, for instance, does not appear to be in any way complicit. He regularly tweets multiple videos a night from the protests and, he said, "It definitely wasn't my intention to drive just the one story."

But the Bible video fit his politics, and his tweet about it caught fire.

Russian Spies and American Conspiracies

Most of the Russian efforts garner far less notice, and unfold on far less well known websites. American officials late last month identified one of those websites as Inforos, an outlet that they said is controlled by Russia's military intelligence service, the GRU, and used to test out various disinformation themes that target Americans, Canadians and Europeans. Covid-19 disinformation, for instance, has spread with the pandemic, and stories about dangers posed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have by now become an old standard.

"Russian intelligence has grown more sophisticated and more highly resourced in their use of online disinformation," said Senator Richard Blumenthal, the Connecticut Democrat, citing a recent State Department report on Russian disinformation. "The methods used in 2016, seem almost rudimentary and quaint."

InfoRos, according to current and former American officials, sits atop a GRU-directed network that includes two other nominally independent news sites, OneWorld.Press and InfoBrics. Those sites, in turn, push out stories to alt-right and alt-left sites in North America and Europe that are receptive to the anti-establishment and often-conspiratorial messaging pushed by the Russians.

In some instances, a straight line can be traced from the GRU-run operations to American websites that promote conspiracy theories. One such story appeared in January, when InfoBrics claimed a whistle-blower had revealed that British spies and Ukraine's former president, Petro Poroshenko, had orchestrated the downing of a Malaysia Airlines flight over eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatists were fighting government forces. (Investigators determined that the plane had been brought down by a Russian-made missile.)

The story was produced by a research fellow at the Center for Syncretic Studies, a think tank in Serbia that is similarly believed to have ties to Russian intelligence. The article was then published by InfoBrics. In turn, it was picked up by The Duran, an independent website based in Cyprus that often spreads Russian disinformation.

Neither the U.S. nor allied governments have publicly identified The Duran as having direct ties to Russia's spy agencies. But the site is where Russian state-sponsored disinformation and fringe theories come together, according to a

NATO cyber-analyst who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.

Russia favors the website and others like it because it publishes user-generated content, allowing it to serve as a clearing house for Moscow's preferred narratives, the analyst said. The Duran has repeatedly targeted NATO, and the alliance has traced the interactions between the site and overtly Russian-backed news networks, such as RT and its Ruptly video news agency.

The Duran itself does not have a significant reach. But it does often feed websites in the United States and Europe that do, as demonstrated by the false story about the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17.

The article jumped from The Duran to popular American conspiracy sites, such as ZeroHedge and RedPill.Institute. By the time it was spreading on social media, there was little to indicate its origins: A Times analysis found 287 tweets that matched the exact text of The Duran's headline, "Ukrainian Whistleblower Reveals MH-17 Tragedy was Orchestrated by Poroshenko and British Secret Service." Yet 166 of the tweets linked to Zerohedge; only 40 linked to The Duran.

"There's more of an effort now to just keep placing these bread crumbs onto these various sites and various blogs and then hope they get picked up authentically," said Bret Schafer, who tracks disinformation for the Alliance for Securing Democracy in Washington.

From there, it is often just a matter of repetition.

"You keep kind of bringing it up," he said. "It just keeps it kind of at the front of people's mind and they start thinking, 'If it's something that is leaking every two weeks, there must be something more to it.'"

Mike Baker contributed reporting from Portland, Ore.

22 JUL, 13:11

Russia's embassy hands note of protest to US over attack on Russian reporters in Portland

TASS – Russian News Agency

WASHINGTON, July 22. /TASS/. Russia's embassy to the United States has handed a note of protest to the US Department of State over an attack on reporters of Russia's Channel One in the US city of Portland, Ambassador Anatoly Antonov said on Wednesday.

The Russian diplomatic mission said on its Facebook page quoting Antonov as saying that in the early hours of July 22, "correspondent Yulia Olkhovskaya and cameraman Vyacheslav Arkhipov were inadmissibly treated by local police."

"The press workers identified themselves loudly and clearly, showing press cards and offering no resistance," Antonov stressed.

"A note of protest has been sent to the Department of State over this outrageous fact. We demand that a thorough investigation should be conducted and we should be informed about its results," Antonov said adding that the US authorities had not replied yet to the "May 31 note of protest over a police attack" on RIA Novosti correspondent Mikhail Turgiyev.

"We promptly contacted the Russians. Their health is not worrying and they do not need medical assistance," Antonov added. "We recommended that they keep a safe distance from the opposing sides."

The ambassador said that according to human rights activists, "the number of incidents with the press has already surpassed 500."

"This year, the United States will evidently top the world ratings in this nomination," the Russian ambassador assumed. "I would like to point out that our journalists are given neither solidarity nor moral support by local media workers," the diplomat concluded underlying that the embassy intends to "insist that the incident be taken into

consideration by the human rights organizations that monitor violations of media workers' rights in the United States."

Earlier, Channel One's press office said that its film crew were injured in an attack by "camouflaged men" in Portland, where protests have been ongoing since the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in late May.

FD-1057 (Rev. 5-8-10)

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FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Electronic Communication

Title: (U) Articles Regarding Russia News Outlets Using Portland Protests to Upend Election 2020

Date: 08/19/2020

From: PORTLAND

Contact:

Approved By: A/SIA

Drafted By:

Case ID #: 804I-PD-3115926 (U/~~FOUO~~)

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b7E

Synopsis: (U) National and local media articles report Russian news outlets are using video coverage from Portland protests to spin controversial stories in an effort to upend the 2020 U.S. Election. In addition, TASS - the Russian News Agency reported the Russian Embassy to the United States had submitted a note of protest to the U.S. State Department over an 'attack' by American law enforcement on Russian reporters who were on scene covering the protests live in Portland.

Enclosure(s): Enclosed are the following items:
1. (U) Articles published by the New York Times, the Oregonian, and TASS - the Russian News Agency.

Details:

Recent articles published by *The New York Times* and the *Oregonian* report Russian news outlets are using video coverage from Portland protests to spin controversial stories in an effort to upend the 2020 Election. In addition, TASS - the Russian News Agency reported the Russian Embassy to the United States had submitted a note of protest to